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Cover Page Footnote

This article is from an earlier iteration of *Diálogo* which had the subtitle "A Bilingual Journal." The publication is now titled "Diálogo: An Interdisciplinary Studies Journal."

The Lady Behind the Mask and Other Writing

By Michelle Lopez

THE LADY BEHIND THE MASK

Behind this mask there is a pretty li'l lady.
I will not, I can not tell a lie.

But behind another mask
There is an undercover lover, hoping.

Behind the main mask is
a mother of four,
which she will do anything for.
Living a single mother,
a mother of four
would sometimes
be poor.
With that mask
I can put up with a daily task.

Wishful thinking to forget
about my past.
Living it like a movie cast,
between drinking and smoking.
Who was playing the part?
Now I feel it's time for me to depart.

I wear my mask
through thick and thin.
Praying to make it to the end.
And without my mask
I won't be able to
live up to my daily task.

LOOKING INTO A PHOTOGRAPH

Looking into a photograph, I see
a little girl with spiral sandy blonde hair
as she paused by a pond with her hands on her hip
picking her curls.

My name is Michelle Lopez, a middle aged Mexican from San Diego, California. I am 32 years of age. I have had my ups and downs in life. Until my incarceration where it all went down on March 13, 2000. I was arrested for drug trafficking and got sentenced to eight years in prison.

At the beginning of my incarceration I was booked into Cook County jail where I started taking poetry class, which I wasn't too sure about at the beginning. But along down the road I loved it. Why?

Well, because it taught me who I was. And how I felt about myself. And what I put my family through. Which was through a lot of shit!! Excuse the language. Like they all say, you learn from your mistakes. Which I have.

I'd like to say expressing your feelings or anybody's feelings in poetry to me was wonderful.

I'd like to send a message to all the Latina women out there not to take life for granted. Enjoy it. If you have children, love them and be the best role model to them.

Thanks.
—Michelle Lopez

WOMEN & PRISON

The following are just some of many statistics:

Young: 75% are between the ages of 25 and 34

Low Income: 50% lived below the poverty line and were unemployed when arrested

Women of Color: African-American women are 8 times more likely to receive jail sentences than European-American women. In California, the state with the largest population of women in prison, 46% are African American and 30% are Latina.

Mothers: 78% are mothers of dependent children

Non Violent Offenders: 75% for non-violent offenses

Survivors of domestic or sexual abusive intimate relationships

Victims of Substance Abuse: 90% have a history of drug and/or alcohol abuse. The main reason for the high increase in imprisonment of women is the 'war on drugs'

Mentally ill: Due to insufficient mental health services in the community, massive incarceration of drug addicted women, the stresses of incarceration including sexual abuse by guards.

The number of prisoners with histories of drug abuse is growing but the proportion of prisoners receiving treatment declined from 40% in 1991 to 18% in 1997

Incarcerated women in U.S. prisons often suffer punishment far in excess of their state imposed sentence. At the hands of correctional officers they face widespread sexual abuse ranging from unauthorized body frisks to rape.

Thirteen states offer no legal protections for women against sexual molestation and abuse: The following states have no law: Alabama; Kentucky; Minnesota; Oregon; Utah; Vermont; Wisconsin. The following states have enacted laws since March 4, 1999: Massachusetts; Montana; Nebraska; Virginia; Washington; West Virginia—Amnesty International

An African American woman is eight times more likely than a European American woman to be imprisoned; Latina women experience nearly four times the rates of incarceration as European American women.—National Law Journal, November 2, 1998.

Jurors in the U.S. were polled as to what factors would make them most biased against a defendant, and perceived sexual orientation was chosen as the most likely personal characteristic to bias a juror against a defendant, three times greater than race. -National Law Journal, November 2, 1998.

In the past decade:

In the past decade, the female prison population has grown by 202%, the male by 112%. [1]

There are 17 times more men than women in prison. [3]

73% of women in prison are under 30 years of age. [2]

66% of women in prison were unemployed before incarceration.[2]

92% of women in prison had less than a \$10,000 yearly income.[2]

58% of women in prison have less than a 12th grade education.[2]

54% of women in prison are women of color.[2]

[1] "An Unequal Justice," New York Times, July 10, 1992

[2] National Coalition for Jail Reform, Washington D.C.

[3] "Women: The Road Ahead," Time, Special Issue, Fall 1990